

and why? Why do only certain individuals come to participate in movement activity while other similarly situated individuals sit on the sidelines?

- The fourth focal question concerns the *dynamics* of social movements. What happens once a movement has surfaced and is, so to speak, up and running? More concretely, how do social movements go about the business of strategically pressing their claims and dealing with the various relevant actors within their field of operation?
- The fifth and final question we investigate concerns what most scholars and social movement activists consider the bottom-line question: What difference do movements make, and for whom and in what ways? Do social movements play an important role in challenging authorities and generating and halting social change? Are there other functions that they perform? What, in short, are the *consequences* or *outcomes* of social movements?

It is these questions, then, that anchor the five subsequent chapters. It is our hope that our elaborations on these questions provide a good understanding of the character of social movements and the array of factors that affect their emergence, operation, and consequences. We also hope that our work here will stimulate further investigation of a particular movement of interest, of one of the focal questions asked about social movements, or of social movements in general.

Chapter Two

MOBILIZING GRIEVANCES

WHEN INDIVIDUALS COLLECTIVELY challenge authorities via social movements, they typically do so over matters about which they are deeply troubled, have considerable concern, and feel passionately. These troublesome matters or conditions, and the feelings associated with them—such as dissatisfaction, fear, indignation, resentment, and moral shock—can be thought of as grievances. They provide the primary motivational impetus for organizing social movement campaigns and for engaging in social movement activities. Consequently, none of the various sets of conditions necessary for the emergence and operation of social movements is more important than the generation of deeply felt shared grievances, which we define below as mobilizing grievances. After all, it is difficult to imagine most individuals engaging in social movement activity without feeling deeply aggrieved about some condition that is regarded as contrary to the interests, rights, moral principles, or well-being of themselves or others. Think for a moment of the adherents of the pro-choice and pro-life movements, and of those advocating for and against same-sex marriages in the United States. Not only are the adherents of one movement deeply aggrieved by the prospect of the other movement achieving its goals, but their passions about their movement are often palpable and thus worn, metaphorically, on their sleeves. Certainly other motivational

factors—such as curiosity, the desire for approval, and peer pressure—may come into play when considering why people align themselves with a particular movement, but these usually are secondary and largely irrelevant in the absence of deeply felt grievances.

The objective of this chapter is to illuminate our understanding of the generation of the kinds of grievances that contribute to the emergence and operation of social movements. We refer to these grievances as *mobilizing grievances*, and we conceptualize them as grievances that are shared among some number of actors, be they individuals or organizations, and that are felt to be sufficiently serious to warrant not only collective complaint but also some kind of corrective, collective action. We focus on factors that generate mobilizing grievances and ask specifically what conditions and/or processes account for their emergence.

We address this question by proceeding along two paths. First, we identify a number of arguments and theses regarding grievances. Second, drawing on the salvageable remnants of this discussion, we elaborate an integrative understanding of the development of mobilizing grievances.

GRIEVANCE GENERATION THEORIES AND OVERSIGHTS

Given the important connection between grievances and social movements, one would think that scholarly understanding of this connection should be well developed theoretically and empirically. Such is not the case, however, as the role of grievances in relation to a movement's emergence and mobilization has been, until quite recently, either glossed over or treated in too simplistic and one-dimensional a fashion. The reasons for this limited understanding can be traced to several unsatisfac-

tory theoretical arguments and/or oversights: the argument that grievances are ubiquitous and therefore relatively inconsequential compared with other conditions that allow for their collective expression; the argument that grievances materialize fully formed out of specifiable objective, material conditions; the argument that grievances can be understood primarily in terms of heightened psychological states or thresholds; and the neglect of grievance interpretation or the process through which mobilizing grievances are partly socially constructed.

Grievances as Ubiquitous and Irrelevant

We begin with a common thesis in the literature on grievances that contradicts much of what we have just said about the importance of mobilizing grievances. The thesis is that grievances are ever-present features of social life and therefore relatively inconsequential for the emergence and operation of social movements. This argument, which surfaced in the wake of the contentious social movement activity of the 1960s and in response to the shortcomings of a number of the other theories we will consider shortly, views grievances as constants and therefore impotent as explanatory variables. Grievances, much like weeds, are thought to flourish naturally and abundantly, irrespective of environmental context or social conditions. Thus, the authors of a well-known article on a series of farm worker movements between 1946 and 1972 write that they “do not deny the existence of” farm worker discontent (or, grievance) but regard it as “relatively constant” and therefore “question” its usefulness “in accounting for either the emergence of insurgent organization or the level of participation by the social base.”¹ Similarly, the progenitors of the resource mobilization approach, which we

will accent in the next chapter, once took a strong position with respect to the omnipresence of grievances, contending “there is always enough discontent [grievance] in any society to supply the grassroots support for a movement.”²

If grievances are a ubiquitous feature of social life, which is implied as well by earlier scholars who highlight the conflictual nature of social life,³ then there is little analytic value in pondering the origins of mobilizing grievances and their relationship to social movements. Far better, instead, to focus almost exclusively on the kinds of structural factors conducive to social movement activity, such as resource flows and political opportunities, which have been the focus of much social movement theorizing and research since the mid-1970s.

There would be no problem with such foci if mobilizing grievances were in fact ubiquitous. But they are not! Individual-level grievances may be ubiquitous, but mobilizing grievances are not. Recall that mobilizing grievances are shared and experienced, or felt, as sufficiently aggravating to warrant not only collective complaint but also joint, ameliorative action. Individual grievances, in contrast, are experienced individually rather than collectively. They typically encompass the kinds of discontents and aggravations experienced on a regular basis by most people, such as dissatisfaction with a raise, office procedures, or one’s boss, or having to wait too long for a scheduled physician’s appointment or in lines at the bank, the grocery store, the gas station, or on the freeway. These kinds of aggravations, which escalated and became overwhelming for Michael Douglas in the movie *Falling Down*, are ubiquitous, at least in the modern world. But for most folks they are typically regarded as unpleasant aspects of everyday life about which little can be done, or

for which the payoffs of doing something are generally thought to be minuscule. Additionally, they rarely congeal into collectively shared grievances that spur collective intervention. Thus, the tendency to jettison grievances as an explanatory variable seems ill conceived in light of the distinction between routine, everyday grievances and mobilizing grievances. To contend, moreover, that the grievances associated with social movement activity are ubiquitous is to presume an automatic link between material social conditions and grievances, which is difficult to sustain empirically and theoretically, as we will see in the following sections. Finally, this questionable assumption and the failure to distinguish between individual and mobilizing grievances gloss over the extent to which the formation of the latter is a function of the interaction of various social conditions and social psychological and interpretive processes.

Grievances as a Function of Structural or Material Conditions

The most enduring argument regarding the origins of mobilizing grievances is that they germinate and flourish in relation to one of two distinct kinds of social structural or material conditions: social arrangements that situate aggregations of individuals in an antagonistic position vis-à-vis one another; and social trends and changes that alter existing social arrangements and patterns of social life. The first set of conditions congeal into what can be thought of as the “group conflict and/or inequality” perspective; the second set of conditions cluster into so-called strain theory.

MOBILIZING GRIEVANCES AS AN OUTGROWTH OF GROUP CONFLICT AND/OR INEQUALITY. The orienting assumption of this perspective is

that mobilizing grievances, and thus social movements, are generated by the unequal distribution of rewards (money, status, and power) and opportunities or life chances in a society. They are, in other words, rooted in conflicts over claims to status, power, and other scarce resources among groups (social classes and racial, ethnic, and religious groups) differentially situated within a social system. The principal progenitor of this perspective historically was the political philosopher and economist Karl Marx, who is best known as capitalism's most trenchant critic and as the father of communism. Writing in the middle third of the nineteenth century, Marx, with his compatriot and co-author Friedrich Engels, depicted capitalist society as a mode of production consisting of two conflicting forces organized as social classes based on their relation to the objects and means of production (for example, material resources, tools, factories, and technology). One class, the bourgeoisie, or capitalists, was seen as controlling the objects and means of production; whereas the other class, the proletariat, owning nothing but its labor power, was subject to economic exploitation and political domination. Given this structurally antagonist relationship between the two classes, Marx portrayed the proletariat as the force of progress that had, as its historical mission, the negation of the existing capitalist system of exploitation and domination and the creation of a new order called socialism. Marx articulated this prophecy in his most famous political tract, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. As Engels wrote in the preface of the 1883 German edition of the *Manifesto*:

The basic thought running through the Manifesto ...
[is that] all history has been a history of class struggles, of

struggles between exploited and exploiting classes, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of development; that this struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and the oppressed classes (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie), without at the same time forever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression, and class struggles. ...⁴

The working class, then, was to be the carrier of the idealized movement of all movements: the proletarian revolution. Exactly when this cataclysmic event might occur, however, was not so clear. Marx did not provide a single definitive answer. But running throughout a number of his writings are discussions of several events or trends that can be construed as necessary conditions for the emergence of this vanguard movement. One such set of events includes crises that are internal to capitalism itself, such as an epidemic of overproduction or unemployment. Another is the increasing exploitation and immiseration of the working class. And a third condition is the development of class consciousness on behalf of the working class, a consciousness that signals the transformation of the working class from a "class-in-itself" into a "class-for-itself." The former refers to the objective situation of a class without an implication of members' understanding of their situation in relation to the economic system as a whole and to each other. A class-for-itself, however, arises when members of a class-in-itself become conscious that their fates are joined, that they are the objects of exploitation and oppression, that they share a common enemy, and that any significant change in their objective situation requires dramatic

alteration of the social system.⁵ Here again, Marx did not clearly specify how or under what conditions this transformative process would occur. Consequently, one is left to ponder and debate whether it would occur naturally or spontaneously when the previous conditions reached a certain unspecified but intolerable threshold, or whether it would have to be organizationally molded and facilitated as Vladimir Ilyich “Nikolai” Lenin, one of the major leaders of the Russian Revolution and architects of the former Soviet Union, pondered and concluded affirmatively in *What Is to Be Done?*⁶

The flow of history in the more than one hundred years since Marx and Engels penned the *Manifesto* clearly calls into question the presumption of a direct, automatic linkage between class antagonisms and the formation of mobilizing grievances of sufficient magnitude to foster working-class revolt. There have been labor movements and strikes and other outcroppings of working-class unrest.⁷ But the prophesied proletarian revolution never materialized in advanced capitalist societies for a variety of reasons. Not only did Marx fail to anticipate the evolution and growth of the middle, managerial class, but the immiseration of the working class failed to reach the level of wretchedness that Marx and others envisioned. Additionally, the development of strident working-class consciousness has been neutralized by multiple, cross-cutting associations and identities rooted in ethnicity, race, religion, and gender; by the existence of national, mythic narratives that highlight, as in the United States, shared belief in the prospect of upward mobility; and by the nonclass character of many competing sides of many public issues, such as crime control and the debate over abortion.

Because of such countervailing influences and the nonmaterialization of the hypothesized proletarian revolution, the German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf suggested a modification of Marx’s core thesis by switching the locus of conflict from class antagonisms to organizationally and institutionally embedded conflicts.⁸ Such a reformulation suggests a somewhat broader proposition than Marx’s class-based thesis regarding the origin of mobilizing grievances associated with collective challenges to authority: they are rooted in underlying conflicts of interest among categories of social actors differentially arrayed hierarchically in a social system. This suggests, in accord with the previous argument, that the basis for conflicts, and thus mobilizing grievances, is ubiquitous. A quick scan of the distribution of resources, privilege, and opportunity in almost any society or organizational context seems to indicate that the above proposition is, in fact, a truism of social life. Yet conflicts do not always materialize, not even when the structural conditions seem ripe for conflict. Moreover, the existence of conflict does not automatically predict the emergence of mobilizing grievances. Consequently, it is clear that the existence of social conflict, whether rooted in class, organizational, or group antagonisms, is not a sufficient condition for the emergence of social movements.

To note that a given condition is not sufficient for the occurrence of a particular phenomenon is not to conclude that that condition is irrelevant or unrelated to the phenomenon in question. It may well be that the presumed connection occurs only in some category of cases or in conjunction with other conditions, some of which may modify the relationship. The later is exactly what Bert Klandermans and his colleagues found in a study of

grievance formation in South Africa between 1994 and 1998.⁹ The apartheid policies of the pre-1994 government yielded a deeply segregated and divided society, but social movement protest among black South Africans was not as widespread or temporally persistent as one might expect given the profound differences in race-based inequalities. This, obviously, was not due to the absence of grievances among black South Africans. The highly repressive measures of the South African government no doubt functioned to suppress the mobilizing potential of those grievances, as political opportunity theorists would argue. However, the Klandermans study—based on structured, face-to-face interviews with a representative, stratified sample of between 2,220 and 2,286 South Africans aged eighteen and over, conducted annually over the five-year period from 1994 through 1998—revealed not only that the material base of the grievances changed over time from predominately race-based to class-based, but also that the effects of the objective, material conditions were modified by subjective assessments, such as comparative evaluation of one's situation with that of others and the level of trust in the government. In other words, the character and depth of grievance among South Africans was not an automatic artifact of their racial category or socioeconomic situation. On the contrary, it was affected as well by various social psychological factors. We will return to such social psychological factors after considering a second kind of structural argument regarding the well springs of mobilizing grievances.

MOBILIZING GRIEVANCES AS AN OUTGROWTH OF SOCIAL "STRAINS."
An equally persistent idea in the study of social movements, dating back to at least the classical writings of Émile Durkheim,

is that their underlying mobilizing grievances are the by-products of social changes and trends traditionally conceptualized as "strains."¹⁰ Here there are three different arguments: the "disintegration" or "breakdown" thesis, the absolute deprivation thesis, and the "quotidian disruption" thesis.

Disintegration Thesis. This thesis holds that disruptive social changes loosen the threads of social constraint, thus weakening the social fabric and rendering citizens vulnerable to the appeals of social movements.¹¹ The specific formula advanced to account for disintegrating change varies somewhat from writer to writer, but the core argument is much the same: the traditional sources of social cohesion and integration are weakened or destroyed by war, adverse economic trends, disaster, and the like, thereby causing a rupture or strain in the sociopolitical order that gives rise to grievances that spur social movement activity. Here the mobilizing grievances are seen as springing from the dissolution of social arrangements and patterns of association rather than from conflicts of interests among contending social categories or from social inequalities.

Although this thesis was popular throughout the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, it fell out of favor during the latter third of the century. Disenchantment with it was based in part on a series of studies that contradicted the perspective's central premises. Charles Tilly and his associates, who famously labeled the disintegration thesis "breakdown theory,"¹² provided the most widely cited challenge. In their historical study of protest and rebellion across Europe from 1830 to 1930, they found little compelling evidence linking such collective action to social disintegration. There were, to be sure, significant changes in

the social fabric associated with the spread of industrialization, but the collective action of the time sprang mainly out of new forms of organization, thus prompting the Tillys to prophesize that “no matter where we look, we should rarely find uprooted, marginal, disorganized people heavily involved in collective violence.”¹³ Much subsequent research examining the associational and network characteristics of participants in a variety of social movements has generally confirmed this hypothesis,¹⁴ thus suggesting that mobilizing grievances do not spring automatically from social atomization or breakdown.

Some scholars have also argued that the effect of indicators of disintegration or breakdown applies more to “nonroutine” social movement activity or collective action (for example, violence against property, persons, or both) than to “routine” activity (for example, negotiated and sanctioned marches and rallies).¹⁵ Here again, the findings are not always consistent, but theoretically it makes sense that collective violence against people and property is partly contingent on the relaxation or neutralization of customary restraints, be they moral, legal, or coercive. What, however, accounts for changes in restraint or control remains unclear. One possibility is a decline in government repression, which we will discuss in the following chapter. Another possibility is that the situation is redefined or reframed as intolerable, which we will consider shortly. A third possibility is that some disruptions or strains are more likely than others to congeal into mobilizing grievances.

Absolute Deprivation or Immiseration Thesis. The orienting proposition of this thesis is that dire social, immiserating life conditions—such as the lack of affordable housing, widespread

unemployment, inaccessible health care, extreme poverty, epidemic health problems, and disabling discrimination—are the source of mobilizing grievances among those who suffer them. This is a seemingly sensible thesis at first blush, yet research on the relationship between various measures of absolute or objective deprivation and engagement in social protests or movement activities has produced quite mixed findings. Consider, for example, the relationship between unemployment and participation (which can be used as a proxy for felt grievances) both in riots (which often constitute a form of collective protest) and in social movement activity. Initial studies of the urban riots in U.S. cities during the 1960s, using both individual-level and city-level data, generally found that unemployment rates were not positively and significantly related to these riots, but the most recent reexaminations of the city-level data report that cities with higher rates of black unemployment had higher riot rates.¹⁶ Examining protest events that were clearly sponsored and orchestrated by social movement organizations, a study of homeless protest activity across seventeen U.S. cities in the 1980s similarly found that higher unemployment rates were associated with more frequent homeless protest events.¹⁷

Taken together, these different sets of findings indicate that there is no determinant relationship between measures of absolute deprivation or immiseration and the emergence of mobilizing grievances that incite social movement activity. However, this does not mean that measures of such deprivations may not contribute to the generation of shared grievances. It only says that the relationship is indeterminate, thus prompting questions about the kinds of conditions in which immiserating trends and mobilizing grievances are likely to be linked. One line of inquiry

has been to focus on the concurrence of other conditions. For example, in the above-described studies that found support for the association of unemployment with riot and movement activity, other factors were found to interact with unemployment so that the stress or strain produced resulted from the confluence of a number of measures or conditions. In the case of the riot study, for instance, the effect of unemployment was found to be most salient under conditions of interminority competition.¹⁸

Quotidian Disruption Thesis. We noted above in discussing the disruption/breakdown thesis that some disruptions may be more likely than others to congeal into mobilizing grievances. It is this proposition that is at the core of the quotidian disruption thesis elaborated by David Snow and his colleagues.¹⁹ In contrast to the disintegration thesis, it is not associational ties and bonds of solidarity that are postulated as disrupted or broken, but rather patterns of everyday functioning and routinized expectations associated with those patterns. The basic argument is that the actual or threatened disruption of the taken-for-granted routines and attitudes of everyday life, referred to as “the quotidian,” is especially generative of mobilizing grievances because it renders problematic and uncertain previously habituated ways of conducting one’s daily life. The quality or character of everyday life that is routinized may not be easy, and may even be far from being ideal, but the fact that it is routinized means that its practitioners have become accustomed to it and, therefore, are likely to be particularly aggrieved when it is disrupted in the sense that it is no longer sustainable or reproducible. This also makes sense because, according to some theories and research, individuals are especially averse to the loss of what they already

have and understand and, therefore, will be highly motivated to recoup what they have lost or to guard against the prospect of such loss.²⁰ By implication, this suggests that the actual or threatened disruption of the quotidian should be particularly nurturing of mobilizing grievances.

While this makes for a reasonable thesis theoretically, the question arises whether some types of events are more likely than others to lead to disruption of the quotidian. Examination of the emergence of protest and movement activity in a variety of contexts identifies four categories of such disruptive events. One such category includes accidents and disasters that disrupt a community’s routines, threaten its existence, and are attributable to human negligence or error rather than to natural forces. An example that generated a sudden escalation of intense grievances and considerable social movement activity was the 1979 partial meltdown of a nuclear reactor in the Three Mile Island area of eastern Pennsylvania.²¹ A second category of quotidian disrupting events includes intrusions into or violations of culturally defined areas of privacy and control, such as community space, by strangers or outsiders. Proposed and actual halfway houses, group homes, soup kitchens and shelters for the homeless, and toxic waste dumps constitute well-known examples of such intrusions that almost invariably generate intense mobilizing grievances associated with community and neighborhood movements that cluster under the NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) acronym.²²

The third set of events conducive to quotidian disruption entails dramatic alterations in subsistence routines because of changes in the ratio of resources to claimants or demand. In some instances, an unanticipated decline in resources, such as wages or

their purchasing power, without any substantial change in demand may nurture the soil for mobilizing grievances, as appears to have been the case with many movements among peasants and farmers. In a study of events preceding peasant rebellions in colonial Vietnam and Lower Burma in 1930 and 1931, for example, it was found that the peasants were not troubled so much by economic exploitation so long as there were enough resources to meet subsistence needs.²³ It thus was concluded that exploitation or deprivation per se are not as unsettling to the peasants as are actual or threatened disruptions to their subsistence routines. This same metric was also found to be at work in Argentina in 2002–2003 when “women’s unpaid domestic and caring labor became more difficult and that economic decline hurt poor, working-class, and middle-class women.” It was in this context of “unbearable” declining resources that many Argentine women took to the streets in protest as their “consciousness about their place in society changed, and efforts to dismantle gender inequalities gained momentum.”²⁴

In other instances, an increase in claimants or demand in the face of constant or stagnant resources may stimulate mobilizing grievances, as appears to have been the case in some popular uprisings and revolutions and with some homeless mobilizations. Regarding the latter, one study of homeless social movement activity, associated with fifteen homeless social movement organizations in eight U.S. cities, found that in ten of the cases initial movement activity was prompted in part or fully by the disruption of either individual or organizational routines because of resource deficiencies.²⁵ In the case of the disruption of individual routines, the typical scenario involved one or more homeless individuals realizing that their taken-for-granted subsistence rou-

tines, such as standing in line in soup kitchens or shelters, no longer guaranteed the expected outcome because the growing number of homeless claimants exceeded available meals and/or shelter beds. As a service provider explained when discussing a homeless individual who helped found the National Union of the Homeless: “To get into the shelter, you had to wait in line, and if they fill up, you’re just out of luck. Now these lines were not well supervised, so the bigger guys would fight their way in. [He was] a big guy, and it really ripped him up to have to fight other men so that he could sleep indoors on a floor.”

A fourth set of events disruptive of the quotidian involves dramatic changes in structures of social organization and control. This appears especially in two contexts: when tightly regimented systems of control, formal or informal, are ousted or displaced and routinized patterns of hierarchy and patronage are disrupted; or when there are dramatic changes in policing practices such that routines that were overlooked before are redefined as fair game for police harassment and arrest and are thus disrupted. In both situations, business as usual is disrupted. Research on prison rebellions has shown, for example, that the major precipitating incident is often a change in wardens and the resultant reconstitution of interconnected systems of formal and informal control that alters prisoners’ taken-for-granted routines.²⁶ Similarly, research on homeless social movement activity has shown that such mobilizations are sometimes sparked by changes in city ordinances and associated policing practices regarding the use of public space by the homeless.²⁷

Certainly the prisoners and homeless in question, just as folks who live under the thumb of highly authoritarian political regimes, are likely to harbor various grievances about their

life situations, but they have devised a means of making do and thus surviving in a way that often becomes taken for granted and thus mutes the mobilizing potential of those grievances. When this occurs, so the argument goes, it is the disruption of those taken-for-granted routines that is especially likely to be generative of mobilizing grievances. In specifying a connection between specific instances of quotidian disruption and mobilizing grievances, this thesis offers a more determinative connection between underlying social conditions and grievances than the disintegration thesis. Yet it is also clear that mobilizing grievances also often effervesce in the absence of quotidian disruption.

Grievances as a Function of Social Psychological Factors

Social psychological explanations of grievance formation direct attention to certain psychological conditions or states that presumably heighten existing grievances or signal the emergence of new ones. Although structural or material conditions are neither ignored nor dismissed, they are usually treated as non-differentiated or generalized precipitants of fundamental social psychological states that are regarded as sine qua non conditions for the occurrence of a sufficient level of grievance. In other words, if a certain social psychological state is not reached, then the felt grievances are unlikely to be of sufficient magnitude to spur social movement activity no matter what the underlying structural or material conditions. This logic constitutes what can be thought of as a hydraulic pressure or steam engine model of grievance formation: the hypothesized state, such as frustration, builds up until it reaches a threshold or magnitude that requires release or expression. The classic example of this

sort of theorizing is the frustration-aggression thesis initially developed in 1939.²⁸ Although the concept of grievance is not a central element of this theory, we propose that heightened frustration over some situation or event can be construed as a proxy for grievance. Additionally, the theory makes clear that when a certain level of frustration is reached, it will seek release even if it means that it is redirected to a safe or more readily available target: that is, a scapegoat. Thus, in exploring the sources of an epidemic of lynching of African Americans in the post-Civil War South, the proponents of the thesis argued that decline of cotton prices (material conditions) increased the level of frustration among poor whites, who took out their heightened frustration on available and relatively safe African Americans.

Since this frustration-aggression thesis was initially elaborated, other more refined hypotheses have been propounded. These include, for example, the relative deprivation thesis, which hypothesizes that mounting frustrations, and thus mobilizing grievances, grow in the widening gap between expectations or aspirations and achievements or attainments, between what folks want or think they should have and what they actually have;²⁹ and the status dissonance or inconsistency thesis, which argues that a disjunction between two salient statuses, such as education and job prestige or wages, can generate intense frustrations that, by implication, congeal into mobilizing grievances.³⁰

Empirical examinations of these social psychological theories are mixed, just as they are for arguments regarding structural and material conditions—and for some of the same reasons. The relationship between the more general condition of frustration, or the more specific states of relative deprivation or sta-

tus inconsistency, and mobilizing grievances is indeterminate. Sometimes mounting frustrations are associated with apathy, indifference, and inaction; other times, they may prompt citizens to organize collectively and take to the streets to demand that their grievances be resolved; and still other times, they may be associated with the kinds of indirect, individual-level forms of challenge that have been discussed as everyday forms of resistance, such as “foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth.”³¹ Thus, frustrations or other social psychological tensions alone do not account for such varied responses, but they may be contributing factors.

Frustration, relative deprivation, or status dissonance theories—just as group conflict, disintegration, and absolute deprivation theories—do not take us very far by themselves in explaining the derivation of grievances because they gloss over a number of important social psychological processes and distinctions. First, there is the extent to which assessments of relative deprivation are embedded in multifaceted comparison processes; second, there is the fact that assessments of distributional justice cannot be fully understood apart from parallel assessments of procedural justice; third, there is the tendency to focus on the prospect of gain, or winning new advantages, but to neglect actual or threatened loss; and fourth, there is the neglect of grievance interpretation.

THE NEGLECT OF COMPARISON PROCESSES. The idea of relative deprivation is predicated on one or more subjective comparisons; otherwise, the notion of “relative” would have no meaning. However, much research attempting to assess the relationship

between relative deprivation and social movement activity or protest has either inferred its existence from aggregate statistics of various objective conditions, such as unemployment rates, or treated it in a one-dimensional fashion by focusing on differences in the situation or status of individuals or a group at different points in time. Such assessment strategies are misguided in two ways: First, they skirt the subjective character of relative deprivation. Just because the objective situation of a group is worse at Time 2 than at Time 1 does not mean that the difference will be read as such by the group in question. The difference might go unnoticed or it might be noticed but not interpreted as a grievance, much less one that merits protest. This takes us to the second way in which these assessment strategies are misguided: the failure to give sufficient attention to the multiplicity of ways in which comparisons can occur. For example, comparisons can be intrapersonal or interpersonal and intragroup or intergroup; they can be oriented to different points in time, such as the past or future; and they can be upward or downward. Intracomparisons typically involve individuals or groups assessing their relative attainments or status at two different points in time. Intercomparisons entail comparisons with other people or groups, which can occur at single or multiple points in time. Such comparisons, moreover, are likely to be complicated by the selection of the comparison group and whether the comparison is upward or downward. The effects of such comparisons can be seen in the previously mentioned study of grievance formation in South Africa from 1994 through 1998. While both intra- and interpersonal comparisons were found to contribute importantly to the formation of grievances beyond race and class, interpersonal comparisons were far more important, largely be-

cause they provide a better sense of how one's group stands in comparison to other groups in terms of the distribution of valued resources. Temporal comparisons were also important, with those people who thought their current situations were worse than in the past—and/or expected their situations to be worse in the future—feeling particularly aggrieved. As the authors concluded: “Regardless of the objective conditions, comparisons suggesting that one is worse off than others or worse off than in the past, or the expectation that one's situation will be worse in the future, are powerful generators of grievances.”³²

In this study, as with most research examining relative deprivation in relation to social movements, the comparisons examined are typically upward: that is, with people or groups that are higher in some status or economic hierarchy. This is hardly surprising, of course, since relative deprivation does not exist in the absence of such upward comparisons. But this focus glosses over the established observation that people will often make downward comparisons to protect or enhance their self-regard. When this is the case, there also is a disjunction between objective conditions and subjective assessments, which explains in part why assessment of relative deprivation can be a tricky undertaking without considering the various ways in which comparisons can occur.

THE NEGLECT OF ASSESSMENTS OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE. Such comparisons can also be complicated by whether the outcomes are regarded as fair or unfair, just or unjust. But assessment of the fairness or justice of distributional outcomes, such as differences in wages or grades, can also be complicated by assessment

of the procedures through which the distribution in question was derived. Students may not always like the distribution of grades in their classes, but they are unlikely to feel aggrieved if the procedures or metric on which the grades are based are accepted as fair or just. Such observations alert us to the distinction, made by equity theorists in social psychology, between distributive justice and procedural justice.³³ Distributive justice concerns the fairness of the distribution of valued resources or rewards, such as income and grades; procedural justice refers to the fairness of the procedures on which the distributions are based.

This distinction helps us understand that individuals can feel relatively deprived and unhappy about their respective incomes or lifestyles in relation to others with whom they compare themselves and yet not feel deeply aggrieved because they regard the underlying procedures on which those differences are based as being reasonably fair or just. It is in large part because of this kind of calculus that the majority of people in Western societies consider the economic inequality they experience or see as fair or just.³⁴ And, by implication, it is why folks who are on the wrong end of some distributional scheme in terms of objective criteria do not always consider themselves deprived or mistreated. Another way of putting it is that the mobilizing potential of distributional differences is muted by procedural considerations. This, moreover, is what the previously discussed South African study found. Using trust in government and perceived influence on government as proxies for procedural justice, it was found that variation in these measures moderated the effect of living standard on grievance formation. In other words, objective conditions were less likely to be associated with grievance forma-

tion when respondents trusted government or felt that they had some measure of influence.³⁵

THE NEGLECT OF ACTUAL OR THREATENED LOSS. Social movements often promise to ameliorate existing social conditions and to improve the life situation of their adherents in one or more ways. Although emphasizing the promise of a better day ahead is more commonly associated with so-called progressive movements, religious-based movements also often direct attention to a utopian future state, as with St. Augustine's "City of God" or the current Christian evangelical movement's enchantment with the presumed advent of "the Rapture." In general, it would appear that the appeals of social movements are often couched in the language of some kind of improved situation or "gain." However, as previously suggested, the kinds of material conditions most directly generative of mobilizing grievances are those that disrupt taken-for-granted, habituated daily routines, or at least threaten to do so. This results in part, as propounded by prospect theory within cognitive psychology, because individuals are especially averse to loss and, therefore, are more likely to take action, however risky, to preserve what they already have than they will to gain something new. If so, then we should expect forecasted or anticipated threats to one's current situation to be important sources of grievance.

Again, the study of grievance formation in South Africa provides confirmatory findings. Among survey respondents sharing the same objective conditions (race and class), those who feared that their life situation would be worse in the near future felt more aggrieved than those who believed their situation would improve.³⁶ Although hardly a startling finding, it underscores

two important points: the effect of objective, material conditions on grievance formation is likely to be moderated by social psychological factors; and the presumed prospect of decline or loss is likely to be an especially potent generator of grievance.

THE NEGLECT OF GRIEVANCE INTERPRETATION. The final troublesome oversight has been the tendency to neglect the extent to which the kinds of social dissatisfactions, personal affronts, and everyday aggravations constitutive of grievances are partly social constructions and thus subject to differential interpretation. This tendency is long-standing and pervasive in that it dates back to the mentioned ideas of Marx and Durkheim regarding the material origins of mobilizing grievances, and it is present in each of the preceding tendencies. If mobilizing grievances are ubiquitous, if they arise naturally and spontaneously in the course of antagonistic group relations or in the face of disintegrative social change or immiserating social conditions, or if they are spawned routinely by intense frustration or relative deprivation, then it is reasonable to expect affected aggregations of individuals to be deeply aggrieved and eager to press their claims through joint mobilization. "If the mere existence of privations" were "enough to cause an insurrection," then, to paraphrase Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the Russian revolution, "the masses would be always in revolt."³⁷ But they are not, as history is replete with examples of aggregations of individuals who are exploited economically, who are deprived relative to their neighbors, and who are objects of stigmatization and differential treatment, but who have not mobilized to collectively challenge the responsible agents, or even some scapegoat, for their situation. Thus, collective protest or social

movement activities do not follow automatically on the heels of antagonistic group relations, disintegrating or dire social conditions, or intense frustration, deprivation, or disappointment.

One of the reasons such material conditions or psychological states do not automatically generate mobilizing grievances is that they are subject to differential interpretation. That is to say, the meanings or implications of such material conditions and psychological states for some kind of action are contestable and thus open to discussion and debate. This is evident when we consider what constitutes an injustice. Some scholars have argued that injustice is the primary grievance underlying most social movement activity,³⁸ but the matter of the kinds of events and conditions constitutive of injustices is rarely self-evident or incontestable. Rather, the designation of some condition as an injustice is typically a matter of interpretation, as suggested by our discussion of the distinction between distributive and procedural justice. Additionally, the resultant negotiated and imputed meanings are not fixed but subject to change as the social context changes. Shifting patterns of interaction and identification are especially likely to alter the meanings we attach to persons, groups, nations, events, experiences, things or material objects, and even to one's biography and self-concept.

The interpretive malleability of one's biography and sense of self, for example, was repeatedly illustrated during the course of Snow's field research on recruitment and conversion to the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement (now called Soka Gakkai International) in the United States during the first half of the 1970s. Whether in the context of a movement meeting or a personal conversation, members would routinely recount not only

the various problems they had prior to encountering Nichiren Shoshu and the power of chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo but also the observation that they were not fully aware of these problems until they began to chant.³⁹ As one member, a single male in his twenties, explained:

Now as I look back I feel that I was a total loser. At that time, however, I thought I was pretty cool. But after chanting for a while, I found out my life before was just a dead thing. The more I chanted, the more clearly I came to see myself and the more I realized just how many problems I had.

Similarly, a single women in her twenties indicated that it was not until she "attended these meetings and began chanting" that she "really began to see that [her] personal life was a mess."

Although such examples of "biographical reconstruction" are commonplace in religious contexts and movements, they are hardly peculiar to just the religious realm, as illustrated by Kathy Blee's study of women in four racist hate movements (Christian Identity, Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazi, and white power skinheads) in the United States.⁴⁰ She found, for example, that her informants "reassessed their interests as women" and "re-made themselves in a racist mold" once they joined the movements and became more deeply involved. As she observed in the case of two informants:

Originally, neither Jill nor Janice was very focused on racism. Both held ill-defined ideas, if any, about their self-interest as whites. Once involved with racist group members, however, each began to consider herself and the world in more racialized terms. Jill changed from a stance of political apathy to

what she described as “racial awareness,” Janice from skirting the edges of white supremacy to speaking on its behalf. In the process, both Jill and Janice came to see their interests as diametrically opposed to those of non-Aryans.⁴¹

In each instance, we see that the grievances invoked to rationalize participation were partly a function of the interpretive process of biographical reconstruction. To note this is not to discount the existence of an empirical substrate to the concerns alluded to by each individual. But each person’s account makes clear that whatever issues existed prior to interaction with the respective movements they joined, those issues were not seen as particularly troublesome or pressing until they viewed them from the vantage point of the relevant movement, thus underscoring the importance of grievance interpretation.

Just as biographies may be subject to differential interpretation over time and across different groups or movements, so are collective entities; experiences; events or happenings; and matters that are seemingly even more fundamental, such as whether an event or condition constitutes an injustice that demands intervention and elimination. In light of such observations, it is necessary to step back and examine more closely the contribution of interpretative processes to the generation of mobilizing grievances.

FRAMING PROCESSES AND GRIEVANCE FORMATION

In the past twenty years, a perspective has surfaced within the study of social movements that treats interpretive processes seriously. Referred to as the “framing perspective,” it views social movements not merely as carriers of existing ideas and mean-

ings but as important signifying or interpretive agents actively engaged in producing and maintaining meaning for their constituents, antagonists, and bystanders. The concept of framing is borrowed from Erving Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* and is rooted in the symbolic interactionist and constructionist principle that meanings do not naturally or automatically attach themselves to the objects, events, or experiences we encounter. They arise, instead, through interpretive processes mediated by culture. Applied to social movements, the idea of framing renders problematic the meanings associated with relevant events, activities, places, and actors, suggesting that those meanings are typically contestable and negotiable and thus open to debate and differential interpretation. From this vantage point, mobilizing grievances are seen neither as naturally occurring sentiments nor as arising automatically from specifiable material conditions, but as the result of interactively based interpretation or signifying work. The verb *framing* conceptualizes this signifying work, which is one of the activities that social movement adherents (leaders, activists, and rank-and-file participants) and other actors (adversaries, institutional elites, media, countermovements) perform on a regular basis.

One way in which framing manifests itself in relation to mobilizing grievances is in terms of diagnostic framing, which is one of the three core framing tasks (for prognostic and motivational framing, see Chapter 4) confronting movement entrepreneurs, leaders, and activists. Diagnostic framing involves two signifying activities: the first is the problematization of an event, social condition, or aspect of life; the second is the attribution of blame or responsibility for the problematized conditions or state of affairs.

Problematization involves an assessment of a given social condition or event as troublesome, unacceptable, unjust, or intolerable and thus in need of repair or change. It may be triggered by a change in conditions or events, or it may entail the reinterpretation of the same conditions or events, thus generating a new or different understanding. In either case, the problematization of some condition can be based on a shift in current evaluative standards, or the introduction of new ones, as occurs when there is a change in comparison group, from downward to upward; a shift from a focus on distributional issues to procedural matters; or an emphasis on threatened losses. In the case of many “rights” movements, for example, procedural rather than distributional issues are problematized. The claim is not that all folks or groups should necessarily receive an equal share of the pie, but that they should have an equal and fair chance of securing a bigger or better piece of the pie. The unacceptable condition or injustice, then, is that the rules of the game are biased in that they advantage or favor some groups over others. In such scenarios, the rules of the game need to be changed such that the metaphorical playing field is leveled and some social categories are no longer more or less advantaged or disadvantaged than others.⁴² The early part of the civil rights movement in the United States is instructive. While there were certainly grievances over distributional inequities, attention was riveted more on procedural inequities, such as the absence of equal educational opportunity for black Americans. Thus, following the famed 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, in which the Court ruled in favor of integration of public schools and thereby overturned the Jim Crow separate-but-equal doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* fifty-eight

years earlier, in 1896, one of the movement’s battle cries was for equal educational opportunity.⁴³ School desegregation—both K through 12 and at the college and university level—became one of the central objectives and prognostic frames of the civil rights movement, with some of the most memorable collective confrontations occurring at schools throughout the South. One of the most memorable examples occurred when President John F. Kennedy federalized National Guard troops and dispatched them to the University of Alabama to force its desegregation on June 10, 1963. Governor George Wallace of Alabama reluctantly yielded to the federal show of force, allowing two African American students to enroll, but he did not give up his battle to preserve Jim Crow segregation as he attempted to block the desegregation of Tuskegee High School in Huntsville in September of the same year. As before, President Kennedy deployed federalized National Guard troops and forced Wallace to relent once again.

What becomes an animating grievance, or set of grievances, for a movement, then, is often a result of framing discussions and/or debates over such issues as appropriate comparisons and procedural inequities. This is true even in the case of some kinds of quotidian disruptions, which are often preceded by framing debates and contests regarding the matter of victimhood and the character of the threat or loss. Such framing contests are evident in the constitution of grievances promulgated by NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) movements that surfaced in abundance in the United States during the 1980s, as the residents of urban and suburban neighborhoods found themselves “threatened” by the proximate location of facilities for so-called undesirable individuals or activities, such as group homes, halfway houses,

restitution centers, homeless shelters and soup kitchens, and toxic waste facilities.

The campaign of the city of Austin, Texas, to relocate and build a new Salvation Army facility primarily for the homeless in the mid-1980s provides an interesting case in point. The existing facility was not only much too small to help meet some of the many needs of the city's rapidly expanding homeless population but was located on property that was coveted by developers associated with the glittering redevelopment of the booming downtown. Consequently, there was dire need for a new facility in a new location.

The relocation effort proved particularly onerous and contentious, however, as it moved from one neighborhood to another, engendering at each prospective site strident, organized community opposition that constituted localized, small-scale NIMBY movements. At the core of the framing efforts of the NIMBY movements in Austin was the portrayal of the neighborhood and its residents as being victimized by the proximate relocation of the Salvation Army. This was not a simple rhetorical task, however, since claiming or establishing victimhood implies the existence of causal agents or perpetrators, thus calling for attribution of blame, which is the second signifying aspect of diagnostic framing.

In the Austin case, attributing blame for the claimed victimization was complicated by the Salvation Army's lofty moral status as an agent of Christian charity and outreach. Thus, a more negatively evaluated target of blame and opposition was needed, which was provided by the growing numbers of transient homeless men who had migrated to Austin and were served by the Salvation Army. As one neighborhood activist revealed: "Every-

body believed we couldn't fight the Salvation Army because it is good. But you can make anything look bad. So we focused on the transients, and emphasized how they threatened neighborhood residents, particularly women and children." That was exactly what the neighborhood activists did, repeatedly framing the homeless as criminally inclined, drunken, sex-crazed men who would infiltrate their neighborhoods and "rob their homes" and "rape the women." As the two researchers observed:

in one prospective neighborhood, signs were hung on doors asking "Do you want your women raped and your children mauled?" In another, residents appeared before the city council carrying placards that read "Vagrance [*sic*] and kids don't mix" and gave testimony highlighting the threat to women and children posed by the homeless. One neighborhood resident emphasized "how the neighborhoods will be unfit for raising children," and another angrily asked the council whether they understood the "impact these womanless men will have on schoolchildren, on women, and on families." The local Catholic university located adjacent to one of the prospective sites joined the resistance, similarly framing its opposition in terms of the danger the homeless posed to its students. As the chairman of the university's board of trustees emphasized on three different occasions at one board meeting: "We have to be able to reassure the thousand coeds on campus, and I don't think we can."⁴⁴

At the same time that these local NIMBY movements were attempting to mobilize citizens and persuade political officials about the dangers of locating facilities for the homeless next to residential neighborhoods, the Salvation Army and its propo-

nents were not sitting by idly. Rather, they were offering their own counterframings that attempted, in some instances, to deflect attention from homeless men to the many poor and homeless women and children the Salvation Army served and, in other instances, to reframe homeless men as victims rather than potential victimizers. Thus, public hearing after public hearing in city council chambers were essentially framing contests between local NIMBY activists and adherents, on the one hand, and advocates, on the other hand.

In addition to underscoring the relevance of framing activities, particularly diagnostic framing, to the development and crystallization of mobilizing grievances, this case illustrates another important feature of movement framing activities: they generally occur in a contested discursive field consisting minimally of three sets of actors—the protagonists, or activists and advocates, proffering the challenging frame, as represented by the NIMBY movements in the Austin case; the antagonists, including both targets and groups or movements with competing interests who often engage in counterframing, as did the Salvation Army and the Austin city government; and one or more groups of bystanders who may be indifferent or open to being swayed in one direction or the other, as illustrated by the city council members in the above case.⁴⁵ Such discursive fields highlight the fact that the construction of mobilizing grievances and the associated framing activities occur in a dynamic, interactive context.

An additional consideration needs to be emphasized: mobilizing grievances are not solely social constructions or merely the products of framing activity; they are constrained, in part, by the material conditions and events that are being framed.

Yet, although there may be empirical substance to the events or conditions in question, it is also the case that they typically lend themselves to differential interpretation and thus invite different framings. Consider, for example, the claims of the Heaven's Gate movement. Recall, as noted in Chapter 1, that nearly forty members of the movement committed mass suicide in San Diego in March 1997 because they believed their deaths would guarantee them heavenly passage aboard a UFO trailing the Hale-Bopp comet streaking through the universe within eye-sight of Earth. The claim that a flying saucer was hidden in the tail of the comet was certainly empirically unfounded, but the existence of the comet and its tail of gasses were incontestable empirical facts. For end-of-the-millennium, otherworldly movements like Heaven's Gate, which presaged the end of the world ("Planet Earth About to Be Recycled, Your Only Chance to Survive—Leave with Us"⁴⁶) and was deeply into science fiction ("We watch a lot of *Star Trek*, a lot of *Star Wars* . . ."⁴⁷), the coming and passing of Hale-Bopp, which was the last comet of the century and an especially bright one at that, held a special opportunity. But the meaning of this special coincidence of events depended in large measure on how it was framed. The leaders of Heaven's Gate were able to articulate a connection between the comet and the movement's beliefs that was sufficiently compelling to its small band of adherents to warrant mass suicide. The passing of the comet was an empirical event that the movement seized upon and framed in accordance with its purposes and interests. It was the "marker" the movement had been waiting for. Had the comet not passed so close to Earth, it is unlikely that the event would have been framed as it was, and it is unlikely that the movement's final exit would

have occurred as it did. The point, then, is that the movement's framings regarding its ending on Earth were constructed in relation to, rather than in spite of, an empirical event, but one that lent itself to being framed in mysterious ways, just as passing comets have always done since ancient times.

Movement frames are not only anchored, in part, to empirical events or conditions but constrained by the cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Cultural contexts provide the interpretive material—the codes, narratives, ideologies, general values, and beliefs—that is drawn on to frame events and conditions. However, these materials are not determinative of the social movement frames. Instead, they constitute resources that can be tapped and articulated in different ways to produce, through framing processes, alternative and often novel understandings of events and conditions, whether past or new. As Sidney Tarrow explained with reference to the civil rights movement:

The lesson of the civil rights movement is that the symbols of revolt are not drawn like musty costumes from a cultural closet and arrayed before the public. Nor are new meanings unrolled out of whole cloth. The costumes of revolt [or protest or exit] are woven from a blend of inherited and invented fibers into collective action frames in confrontation with opponents and elites.⁴⁸

This interactive connection between cultural materials and movement frames and claims can be seen even with such seemingly bizarre movements as Heaven's Gate. It is highly improbable that its claim that heavenly passage awaited members' spirits would have been contrived in a cultural context in which Christian beliefs, particularly regarding ascension to heaven,

were not prominent. However, the commission of suicide as the means to release the spirit to catch a ride, via a flying saucer, through the gates of heaven no doubt struck most Christians as highly incredible given the more traditional and canonized understanding of the final days and "rapture." Consequently, the beliefs and claims of Heaven's Gate stood little chance of striking a responsive chord with large numbers of Americans. This suggests that although movements may draw on extant cultural materials to make their claims, there are serious mobilization costs if they stray too far from their cultural moorings or weave together some of those materials in a way that has little, if any, cultural fidelity. This dilemma speaks to the problem of "resonance," which concerns the effectiveness or mobilizing potency of movement framings. Not only are all movements of all kinds confronted with this problem, but their success depends in part on resolving it, thus indicating again how culture constrains the development of mobilizing grievances and movement mobilization more generally.⁴⁹

To illustrate more fully the character of this dilemma, let us return to Beijing in the spring of 1989 and the student-led Chinese democracy movement (see Chapter 1). According to Jiping Zuo and Robert Benford's analysis of the movement, based in part on firsthand observation:

student activists walked a dangerous tightrope. On the one hand, if they framed their grievances in counter-revolutionary terms, they were certain to elicit (almost immediately) a violent response from state officials. . . . On the other hand, if students failed to frame their grievances as to strike a familiar chord among the masses, in all likelihood their frames would

have been dismissed as the immature whining of impetuous youth. Thus the major framing task was to win sympathy and active support from bystander audiences while earning understanding and tolerance from state authorities, or at least to neutralize the legitimacy of any official pretense to using repressive force.⁵⁰

The students addressed this dilemma by grounding their articulation of the injustices and improprieties resulting from state economic reforms in a blend of ideas about freedom and democracy along with traditional Chinese cultural values and narrations associated with Confucianism, communism, and nationalism. By grounding the movement's grievance framings in these cultural traditions, "activists were able to deflect any state attempts to impugn their collective character, particularly attributions regarding their 'patriotism'" . . . , while simultaneously providing other students and ordinary citizens compelling reasons for supporting their campaign.⁵¹ So the 1989 Chinese student democracy movement helped to generate, through its framing activities, mobilizing grievances that resonated with a segment of the population and forestalled a repressive response by the state, at least for a while.

Although strikingly different movements with strikingly different objectives, Heaven's Gate and the Chinese student democracy movement both illustrate the extent to which movement framing efforts, particularly in regard to the generation of mobilizing grievances, are facilitated and constrained by empirical events and conditions and by cultural contexts. Thus, movement activists and leaders may be free in principle to frame events, conditions, and groups as they choose, but they are not

free do so in fact. Activists and leaders and their activities are embedded in an enveloping culture, so to ignore that context in framing efforts is to guarantee nonresonance and thus to doom the movement's mobilizing efforts.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter we have distinguished between individual, everyday grievances and mobilizing grievances, which are shared among some number of actors and felt to be sufficiently serious to warrant both collective complaint and corrective, collective action. Arguing that mobilizing grievances provide the primary motivational impetus for organizing social movement campaigns and for engaging in social movement activities, we have sought to identify and elaborate the conditions and/or processes that account for the generation of mobilizing grievances. Since pursuit of this issue has entailed a fairly long expedition, involving the critical assessment of a variety of perspectives and arguments, we now summarize and bring into sharp focus what we have learned.

The first major point that can be culled from this journey is that mobilizing grievances are more like mushrooms after a spring rainfall than weeds; they do not flourish continuously and everywhere but only under specifiable conditions. Thus, the matter of grievances cannot be sidestepped or ignored by invoking the assumption of ubiquity. That assumption not only is misguided but also wrongly implies that routine, individual grievances are equivalent to mobilizing grievances, thus glossing over the generation of the latter.

Second, it is equally clear that there is no automatic or determinant relationship between structural or material condi-

tions—such as social arrangements that stratify aggregations of individuals unequally or dire, immiserating life circumstances—and the formation of mobilizing grievances. Yet, we also learned that some events and conditions—that is, those that disrupt the quotidian (everyday taken-for-granted routines) and accent what one has lost or is likely to lose—are more likely than others to spur mobilizing grievances. Still, even palpable quotidian disruptions do not always speak, or speak clearly, for themselves. Analogically, structural and material conditions and changes are rather like kindling on the forest floor; they increase the prospect of fire, but other contributing factors must be present for combustion to occur. As Bohan Zawadski and Paul Lazarsfeld concluded in their study of unemployed Polish workers during the great depression of the 1930s:

The experiences of unemployment [read, frustration, discontent, grievance] is a preliminary step for the revolutionary mood, but . . . they do not lead by themselves to a readiness for mass action. Metaphorically speaking, these experiences only fertilize the ground for revolution, but do not generate it.⁵²

In other words, certain structural and/or material conditions may be necessary for the generation of mobilizing grievances, but they alone are not sufficient conditions.

Third, our observations indicate that certain social psychological processes also contribute importantly to the generation of mobilizing grievances. Here we highlighted social psychological processes—comparison processes, assessments of procedural justice, and weighing the prospect of loss—rather than social psychological states—frustration and status dissonance—

because the former constitute the intervening mechanisms that may ignite the fertilized conditions.

Fourth, it has become increasingly clear in recent years that the formation of mobilizing grievances, including the character of the intervening psychological processes, is highly contingent both on the manner in which grievances are interpreted and on the generation and diffusion of those interpretations. The key, in other words, is not merely the presence or absence of grievances but also the process of grievance interpretation, which has been theorized and analyzed empirically in terms of framing processes.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the generation of mobilizing grievances cannot be adequately understood in terms of a single perspective or line of argument. Rather, our journey leads to the conclusion that their generation can best be understood as a function of the confluence and interaction of structural or material conditions, social psychological factors, and interpretive framing processes.